



Alleluia! Sing to Jesus

In 1886 William Dix wrote this text for the celebration of the eucharist at Anglican Ascension Day services. The ascension is a wonder-filled event. Who can comprehend such a mystery? No wonder the disciples stood there speechless, 'looking into heaven.' Most prominently, the second stanza draws on the biblical account of the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1, "Christ is near, faith believes, nor questions how . . ." When we encounter God's mysteries—whether it be creation, the resurrection, or the ascension, truth lies beyond the realm of our logic.

The language of the first and third stanzas--the scepter and throne, the crystal sea—are inspired by the heavenly scene of glory in Revelation 4 and 5. In this scene, the author of Revelation guides us through a door into heaven where we look upon a central high throne surrounded by other thrones, mysterious creatures, and the elders and rulers of the earth, who cast their crowns down before the one true King, crying out "Worthy are you, our Lord and God . . ."

Then, the same Jesus who was born of a woman, used his hands as a carpenter, ate and shared food with his friends, and died a criminal's death is now pictured, in Revelation, as the Lamb who has been slain. But the crown of thorns has become a crown of glory. Before the Lamb, the creatures and elders bow down before him holding bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (5.8).

The praise Alleluia literally means "Praise to God" and is only found in the New Testament at the end of Revelation. Yet, this hymn, like many other hymns, litanies, and prayers, features the phrase prominently. 'Alleluia' for Christians has been a word beyond words, and an expression beyond our understanding. When we find ourselves in the presence of the wondrous mystery of God we are left with no words to speak. Our language is ultimately too limited for a God whose mysteries are beyond comprehension and whose glories are beyond imagination. When we sing together "Alleluia! Sing to Jesus" we are singing to the One who was all of these things—the humble teacher and the Son of God. He is both the King of Kings and the Lamb who was slain.

Eucharist services are an especially meaningful use of this hymn with its reference to Christ as the 'bread of heaven, Christ on earth our bread and stay;' These references along with 'Alleluia' remind us that in the eucharist—as in the ascension and in the heavenly scene of Revelation—there is much we do not understand and cannot comprehend. To partake the eucharist is to enter God's mystery for which our words fall short yet again. Even this simple meal, about which so much has been written and spoken (and about which so much has been argued and fought) is a window into God's mystery and an invitation into God's grace.

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